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MARKETING EDUCATION ON A SHOESTRING: A MODEL

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ABSTRACT

MARKETING EDUCATION ON A SHOESTRING: A MODEL

Few educators envision themselves as marketing or public relations experts, yet economic reality is forcing many academicians into these roles. Over the past four years, the Eastern Washington University Department of Education has developed a successful marketing model for educators. The model begins with a successful reform of department programming and includes research, publication, public relations, internal communications and marketing ideas. This article details each of these areas as well as supplying a rationale for the marketing of educational coursework.

MARKETING EDUCATION ON A SHOESTRING: A MODEL

> Marketing is the management function that identifies human needs and wants, provides products to satisfy those needs and wants, and causes a transaction to occur that delivers products in exchange for something of value to the provider's success or failure.
>
> Center, Cutlip and Broom
> Effective Public Relations

I. Introduction

One guesses that most education professors, when embarking upon their chosen careers, did not envision for themselves a place in the hurly-burly of the open marketplace, or active participation in the free enterprise system. Indeed, the idea still persists that the marketing of education coursework is a dirty job best left to public relations, marketing or advertising professionals so that professors may pursue the various demands of academic life undisturbed.

While that model may still work effectively at major universities with unlimited resources, a desire for economic survival is pushing professors from smaller schools into the muddy marketplace.

For example, by 1982 the Eastern Washington University Department of Education found itself in a paradoxical situation. Clearly, the department needed professional marketing -- not only to raise enrollments but to increase department credibility with several of its constituent

publics. Even its own university, which began as a "normal school" for teachers in the last 1800's, had shifted its attention to highly marketable coursework in the fields of computer science and technology.

On the other hand, the department's low credibility left it last among many departments requiring assistance from the university's marketing/public relations department. Further exacerbating the situation, Washington State funding cutbacks (occasioned by the 1981 - 1982 recession) had reduced the university's public relations department personnel to a single individual.

If a department marketing program were to be developed -- and if it were not, the eventual survival of the department came into question -- EWU Department of Education professors knew they had to assume responsiblity for it themselves.

In the fall of 1983, department members met to discuss their present situation as well as plans for the future. At that time, professors identified several audiences, or publics, with whom relations were less than ideal. These included the local and regional community, the legislature, current and potential students, alumni, fellow educators within Eastern Washington University and regional school districts.

In short, the EWU Department of Education hoped to improve relations with <u>every one</u> of its constituent publics!

Since 1983, the Eastern Washington University Department of Education has:

* instituted educational reforms related to higher entrance and graduation requirements, as well as a more carefully monitored matriculation process;
* publicized the reforms through a number of avenues, including open houses for alumni and districts;
* produced numerous publications relating to the career of teaching, department offerings and specialty fields, such as reading education;
* published 48 articles in national education journals;
* published seven articles in local Spokane newspapers;
* received citations for its reform and marketing efforts in the New York Times as well as Washington State newspapers in Seattle, Tacoma, Wenatchee, Walla Walla and Spokane;
* been accepted for presentations before seven national and two international conference;
* salvaged the EWU Robert Reid Laboratory School (operated for and by the department) which had been threatened with closure;
* received national recognition from the Association of Teacher Educators as one of the top three departments of education in the nation for 1985; and

* continuously informed its own students, future students, alumni, fellow professors and the public of its progress and awards.

Overcoming prejudices against "tooting our own horn" was the first step in this successful marketing effort. For example, a majority of the department's forty professors disagreed with the decision to hire a part-time communications consultant and writer to assist the department's marketing efforts. Funds for the consultant's time therefore came -- and still come -- from private donations. The marketing program itself was undertaken by a few like-minded individuals who decided to proceed <u>despite</u> opposition to the plan.

As the program became more and more successful, former critics joined in recognizing that the department could no longer remain silent, stick to academic "business as usual" and hope for the best. A "pro-active" campaign -- one emphasizing action instead of re-action -- was not only required, but could be pursued without demeaning the academic credentials of the university or of individual professors.

Comparing this marketing effort to that of any major profit or non-profit organization in the United States is probably ludicrous. Department funds earmarked specifically for marketing totalled $950. Even so, in developing its successful marketing model, the department followed a set of

educational, public relations and marketing principles that we believe other departments, especially from small to medium-sized universities with limited resources, may find useful.

Step-by-step, the department:

1. Implemented necessary reforms and incorporated critics into the reform and marketing process;
2. researched the quality of the department's students and programs, as well as general educational issues;
3. undertook a public relations campaign to restore public confidence in department credibility;
4. undertook an internal information campaign to re-establish departmental credibility within the institution;
5. established a marketing program to meet public and individual needs.

Although the long-term effects of this model cannot yet be measured, anecdotal evidence of its success abounds. Student morale has been restored and bolstered, as has department esprit de corps. In addition to national recognition, the department has increasingly reaped the benefits of local recognition and support. The quality of students attracted to teacher education at Eastern Washington University -- always high -- has actually increased in terms of comparative high school and college grade point averages.

We believe that this model has strongly positioned, and will continue to position, our department as a credible institution of teacher education -- a position now recognized by the community and region.

II. A Marketing Program Based on Reform

The first step in the EWU Department of Education marketing process was actually undertaken in 1981 through 1982, and included a thorough revision and reform of the department's offerings in teacher education.

The agency for change in teacher education standards at Eastern Washington University is the Teacher Program Unit. Instituted in 1980 by the Washington State Legislature, the EWU Program Unit is composed of representatives from various constituent publics, including classroom teachers from rural and urban communities, public school administrators, school directors, retired teachers, and faculty members representing academic departments associated with teacher education. This body is not a rubber stamp organization, not a debate club and not just an advisory committee. It continuously reviews current standards, proposes new programs and approves over-all department offerings.

By 1982, Eastern Washington University had adopted all suggested reforms from the Teacher Program Unit. These included increased field experiences for student teachers, increased training in reading and math methods classes,

increased audio-visual and computer instruction coursework, and higher departmental admission standards.

At the same time, the Program Unit suggested a matriculation procedure which enhanced the university's ability to supervise teaching candidates. Among the matriculation steps, candidates must now pass two interviews with professors and public school teachers, must compile a portfolio of required and suggested activities, must pass student teaching, and must pass an exit evaluation prior to certification.

The genius of the Program Unit is its incorporation of department critics into the department's reform and marketing plan. Incorporation insures that critics take responsibility for changes and, at the same time, makes the university more responsive to its "customers."

By the spring of 1983, the EWU Department of Education felt confident that it offered an exemplary teacher education program. Even so, 1983 became the year in which "A Nation At Risk," along with a host of other reports, outlined the deficiencies in American education. Although the department welcomed public attention to educational issues, it also recognized that the reports had drawn unfavorable portraits of teaching itself, as well as schools of teacher education. Student morale was visibly shaken.

Department reforms were commendable in themselves, but the public (and specific "publics," such as future teachers)

remained largely uninformed about the changes that had occurred.

III. Research and Publication

Through departmental discussion and planning it became clear that "our story" was not being told. The department wanted a voice in regional and national education issues. In addition, the department wanted to objectively research the quality of its students and the results of its programs.

To that end, six members of the EWU Department of Education formed an editorial and research team. This group has since published 48 articles about department programs, educational issues and department research. The success of this group has spawned two other department research teams, and both have experienced publication success.

The original group's first published article, entitled "Local Educators Must Balance Local Issues Against National Reports," appeared in the National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin in March of 1984. Research conducted by the group showed that EWU education students obtained higher college and high school grades than their non-education peers, and also scored the same or higher on college board tests. These findings directly refuted statistics in the "Nation At Risk" report which indicated that teaching candidates were drawn from the lowest ranks of academic achievers.

The article also detailed the reforms that EWU had instituted in its teacher education program. The department subsequently received many congratulatory calls from local principals, an indication that the article had been widely read by its intended audience.

Other articles have explored the issues of merit pay, teacher job satisfaction, reading education, teacher probation and dismissal, teacher assurance plans, the purpose of sequential education programs, the leadership roles of principals, and many more.

The department also sponsors a professional journal called Viewpoint, which is published four times a year and distributed to alumni, public school teachers and administrators, and university associates throughout Washington State. The journal serves several purposes. It regularly communicates with alumni, who can be the department's strongest advocates. It also provides another outlet for department research and writing. Last, it encourages an interchange of ideas between the reading audience and department professors.

Another method of communicating with fellow educators has been the appearance of EWU department members on the programs of several national conferences, such as the National Association of Teacher Educators and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. As they are intended, the conferences give EWU professors an opportunity to interact

with fellow professionals while promoting ideas and programs that have proven themselves at EWU.

IV. Public Relations

During the planning process, department members expressed a desire to restore public confidence in teachers, the university and the department itself. (It should be noted that all activities described in this report enhance public confidence to some degree, but some activities were designed primarily to that end.)

The decision to undertake a pro-active public relations program was based on a belief that parent and public awareness are necessary to achieving lasting reform. Schools of teacher education have traditionally received public attention only when something goes wrong. Under that model, the department is continuously perceived in a re-active role.

The most visible result of this decision was the publication of a number of informational brochures and flyers. Specifically, they detailed department and program offerings, as well as matriculation requirements. Hundreds of these materials have been mailed to high schools, community colleges and interested individuals during the past three years.

In the spring of 1984, the department co-sponsored, with the Central Valley, Wa., school district, a publication entitled "What Does A Teacher Really Do?" The publication, which first appeared as a newspaper insert in the Spokane

Valley Herald (circulation: 14,000), focused on the representative activities of eight Central Valley teachers, all of them Eastern Washington University graduates. For the school district, the insert provided an opportunity to honor eight of its outstanding teachers. The university benefited from the teachers' identification with Eastern Washington University. Two thousand copies of the publication have since been distributed to the Central Valley community and to high school seniors by the district and the department.

In 1984 and 1985, two members of the department's Research and Editorial team published a series of general interest education articles in the Spokane Spokesman-Review (circulation: 180,000). The articles, which focused on early childhood development, summertime learning activities and reading, were illustrated and featured prominently by the newspaper. The Review's readership extends throughout eastern Washington State, Idaho, Oregon and Montana.

In 1984 the Eastern Washington University Robert Reid Laboratory School -- one of the few educational lab schools still operating in the United States -- began sponsorship of the Inland Empire Teacher Hall of Fame in cooperation with Washington Mutual Savings Bank, Washington State's largest savings and loan institution.

Each year, the Hall of Fame honors four teachers from eastern Washington districts for excellent contributions to classroom teaching and their students. Those selected may or

may not be Eastern Washington University graduates. Educational leaders as well as local media attend the award ceremony, which is held in the bank's major Spokane branch. Again, this program highlights the many fine, dedicated teachers working for the public in eastern Washington. Media attention has provided some of this area's best teachers with a forum for extolling the virtues of a teaching career. In addition, the Hall of Fame award reinforces the idea that the EWU Department of Education prizes excellent classroom teaching.

Finally, when the department was named one of the top three departments in the United States by the National Association of Teacher Educators, department chair William Shreeve sponsored a full-page advertisement in the Spokane Spokesman-Review. The ad pictured every member of the department, including clerical and support staff. Seven Spokane and Washington State corporations underwrote the cost of the advertisement.

Five thousand copies of the advertisement were distributed to EWU education students following its appearance in the Review. Students were asked to mail the ad home with a personal note "to mom and dad. The department offered to pick up mailing costs. Several of the advertisements distributed to students found their way to state representatives and senators, as well as Washington State's governor Booth Gardner, who wrote a letter of commendation to the department.

V. Internal Communications

Formal and informal internal communications programs have been established by the department. The programs are aimed specifically at informing department students, department and university staff and university leaders of the accomplishments and awards of the department.

To that end, students now receive a department newsletter which can be used for a variety of purposes, such as informing students about program changes or general job prospects for the 1980's. Through this publication and others, EWU education students are made aware of their professors' published articles as well as the department's regional and national recognition.

University publications receive regular bulletins from the department, again detailing publication successes and honors received by individuals or the department. Fellow professors are kept informed through a number of formal and informal university committees and communications channels.

VI. Marketing to Public and Individual Needs

Since marketing funds have been small to non-existent, direct marketing programs have relied heavily on personal contact between the university and its many potential markets. In this realm, virtually every professor within the department and corresponding departments cheerfully answers inquiries from potential students, high school and community college

counselors, returning teachers and the general public. In addition, the deparment annually holds six to ten open houses at state-wide education conventions. Two professors and two alumni are chosen as department representatives for each open house. Refreshments are supplied by the EWU Alumni Association.

The department's strongest marketing move has been the establishment of a Teacher Assurance Program. Like the warranty on a car, the EWU Teacher Assurance Program promises that EWU's graduates will provide quality teaching. First-year teachers requiring remediation receive that help from the department, free of charge. This measure relieves the hiring district of its duty to supply counseling and remediation assistance from internal district staff.

The program also serves as method for correcting EWU program deficiencies. After two years of operation, the assurance program has been utilized by districts twice. In both cases, the teachers displayed problems with classroom management. In both cases, their former EWU classroom management professors served as members of the remediation team. The results: department members quickly pinpointed areas of difficulty and assisted the teachers. Later, they returned to their classrooms to reinforce those lessons with current education students. Over time, the Teacher Assurance Program should provide another avenue for aligning university programs with student needs.

This program was cited in an article on the front page of the New York Times Education section in the fall of 1985. The theme of the edition was accountability in higher education. At that time, EWU was one of only five institutions in the nation offering a Teacher Assurance Program.

The Teacher Assurance Program, which was unanimously adopted by department members, has since been extended to principals and counselors who graduate from EWU credential programs.

VI. Conclusion

The results of the EWU Department of Education marketing program will not be known for several years. As noted in the preface, the "bottom line" of any marketing program involves an exchange of goods or services for items deemed valuable by the sponsoring organization.

For Eastern Washington University, the bottom-line items deemed "valuable" include stable or increasing tuition fees and state funds (both based on continuing or increased enrollments). These, in turn, should ensure the survival of the EWU education department as a viable member of this state's broad academic community (from pre-school and kindergarten through post-graduate school programs).

If the success of the Japanese people in world markets has taught Americans anything, however, it may be the efficacy of long-term planning. In that context, Eastern Washington

University must be involved in a campaign to awaken the American public to the value of education, the value of teaching and the value of good teachers. We, in turn, must insist upon excellence in our programs and in the graduates we send into the educational community.

The term "value" therefore encompasses the widest context. Our marketing approach has focused attention on Eastern Washington University as an institution. It has also reached beyond the particular to the general -- in short, to the values Americans hold dear. Without the restoration of education as a priority item on the American agenda, schools of education will continue to decline despite their best marketing efforts.

Marketing education "on a shoestring" becomes possible when those responsible for an important segment of the educational process -- such as teacher educators -- perceive that a re-commitment to the ideal of American public education is a necessary component of continued success.

At Eastern Washington University, that re-dedication of effort has taken place. Admittedly, debates over marketing methods, ethics and philosophy continue; anyone familiar with the academic world would be surprised if they did not. Yet it is clear that this department's $950 marketing budget has been supplemented by hundreds of hours of donated time on the part of department members. The unanimous vote for the Teacher Assurance Program is another indication of this department's

collegial commitment to increased marketing efforts.

Although academicians may fear involvement in the "glitz and glitter" of the marketing, public relations or advertising community, this fear is based primarily on misperceptions about the roles of those professions. Objectivity, always a strongly held value in the academic and scientific community, is not compromised by a stand in favor of strong academic programs and a reverence for education. Indeed, when the American public reveres education highly, academic pursuits should flourish.

This department has learned that "tooting your own horn" -- although sometimes the province of carnival hawkers and used car salesmen -- may be just another way of "standing up for one's beliefs." The cost of <u>that</u> action -- although possibly dear in personal terms -- is zero (bottom line-wise).

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